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COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-6035

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

January 10, 2024

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BRIAN GARRETT, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

The Honorable Lloyd J Austin III
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Austin:

We wish you a speedy recovery from your recent procedure.

The Committee has transmitted inquiries to yourself, Deputy Secretary Hicks, and Ms. Magsamen regarding your unannounced disappearance and absence from your duties as Secretary of Defense. It is imperative you and other recipients respond as soon as possible.

This incident is gravely serious.

The Department's response to it thus far is not.

If this transfer of authorities was as "clean" or "routine" as described by senior officials it would never have occurred in this manner and certainly wouldn't have taken days to clarify.

Congress, the public, and even the Biden Administration deserve clear answers about who made the decisions that led to Deputy Secretary Hicks not understanding that she was actually acting as the Secretary of Defense and the White House being unaware of the same.

With conflicts around the world, it is preposterous that you and others in the Department allowed this to occur. This level of confusion surrounding not only your whereabouts, but your capacity to lead the Department has shaken what little confidence existed in any previous commitment to transparency.

The Department of Defense and our military institutions are robust. Contingencies exist to survive attacks from our enemies on a global scale. But our defense infrastructure is not equipped for a Secretary attempting to conceal incapacity. While all can appreciate the desire to keep medical issues private, your presence leading the warfighting department must be clear for the Commander in Chief to be able to rely on your guidance. You failed to ensure a smooth transition from your day-to-day management and leadership of the Department by failing to

initiate an obvious and immediate transfer of authority to your deputy and disclosure to relevant officials.

On January 8, 2024, Ms. Magsamen directed the Director of Administration and Management to review these events. This hardly passes for an independent investigation. Additionally, the White House chief of staff launched “a review of protocols for how Cabinet officials delegate authority,” following this negligent string of events.¹ Notwithstanding the Administration-wide review of protocols, the Department must respond to Congress’ questions as soon as possible without further delay by an in-house investigation.

Sincerely,



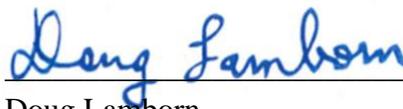
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Robert J. Wittman
Chairman
Subcommittee on Tactical Air and
Land Forces



Austin Scott
Member
House Armed Services Committee

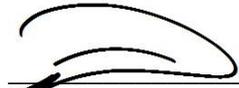
¹ Brett Samuels, *White House orders Cabinet protocol review after Austin hospitalization*, THE HILL, Jan. 9, 2024.



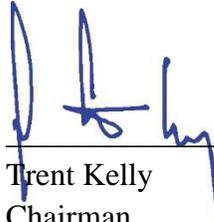
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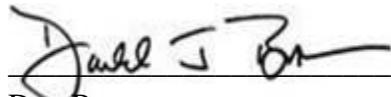
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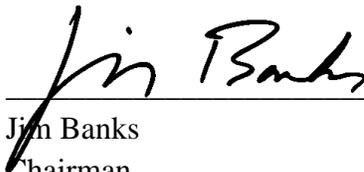
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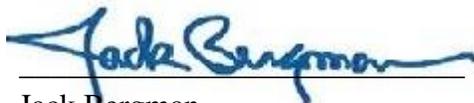
Matt Gaetz
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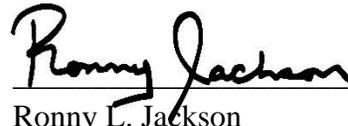
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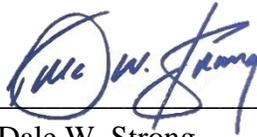
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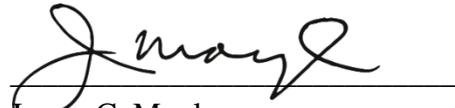
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Richard McCormick
Member
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Lance Gooden
Member
House Armed Services Committee

cc: The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services